Research Article

International Review for the Sociology of Sport
2022, Vol. 57(7) 1021–1043
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DOI: 10.1177/10126902211048769
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Patriotism, competition, nationalism, and respect for the military in US sports: Public recognition of American institutionalized sports nationalism

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Abstract

Using new data from the National Sports and Society Survey ($N = 3993$), this study first examines the extent to which US adults recognize that sports teach love of country, competition as a way of life, respect for the military, and how to be American. We characterize this sport and society process as American Institutionalized Sports Nationalism. Then, multiple regression analyses are used to assess the extent to which dominant statuses, indicators of traditionalism, and sports fandom are associated with beliefs about American Institutionalized Sports Nationalism and its component values. Results suggest that US adults commonly agree that sports teach love of country, competition as a way of life, respect for the military, and how to be American; they are especially likely to agree that sports teach competition as a way of life and love of country. Many US adults also recognize sports as teaching respect for the military and how to be American, but most do not. In addition, as expected, identifying as male, heterosexual, Christian, Republican, and as more of a sports fan is consistently and positively associated with agreeing that sports teach patriotic, capitalistic, militaristic, and nationalistic values. In contrast to expectations, we find evidence that White adults are less likely than Black and Latinx adults to recognize American Institutionalized Sports Nationalism and its component values; college educated adults are also less likely than those with a high school education or less to agree that sports teach patriotism, capitalism, militarism, and nationalism. This may be because sports have traditionally been perceived to offer

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rather inclusive and fair social and economic opportunities for non-Whites and the less educated. Regardless, it is important to continue to research which cultural messages are promoted through sports, why, and to what effect. The present study advances this research initiative.

Keywords
American culture, capitalism, militarism, nationalism, patriotism

Introduction

Sport is an institution that embodies, teaches, and affords opportunities to negotiate the character, celebrated traditions, and values within countries throughout the world (Bairner, 2001; Carrington, 2010; Gruneau, 1999). Given its cultural relevance, sport is often intentionally used to bring citizens of different ideological backgrounds and experiences together and attempts to unify them with shared understandings of cultural values and national characteristics; in fact, many individuals relish the experience of these processes (Bairner, 2001; Gruneau, 1999; Knoester et al., 2021; Newman and Giardina, 2011). Yet, scholars have frequently noted problematic connections in sport to nationalism, militarism, and neoliberalism across the globe (Andrews and Silk, 2012; Bairner, 2001; Butterworth, 2017; Carrington, 2010; Gruneau, 1999). These connections may be particularly heightened in the United States because of the enormous commercialization of sport in the country and its citizens' common perception of American exceptionalism in the creation of an ideal society—including its sport offerings, celebrations, and performances (Bairner, 2001; Gruneau, 1999; Knoester and Ridpath, 2020; Knoester et al., 2021; Montez de Oca, 2013). Yet, little is known about how self-aware US adults are of the patriotic, neoliberal, nationalistic, and militaristic messaging in sport (Gruneau, 1999; Knoester et al., 2021; Montez de Oca, 2013; Newman and Giardina, 2011).

For many Americans, sport represents the best of society and celebrates core values that are cherished in the country. In fact, most Americans believe sport should (66%) and does (60%) instill idealized American values, such as hard work, teamwork, and self-discipline (USADA, 2011). Indeed, historical and qualitative research especially reveal that sport is a primary contributor to cultural values and American identities. Sport is an essential institution in the United States, where people can learn what it means to be an American, and celebrate this, through their sports involvement (Birrell, 1981; Bryant, 2018; Montez de Oca, 2013; Newman and Giardina, 2011). However, the presentation of US sport as inherently American, prosocial, and representative of all people often ignores the inequalities that persist in sport (Knoester and Rockhill, 2021; Leonard, 2017; Newman and Giardina, 2011; Spaaij et al., 2015). It seems that those who embrace a glorified story of sport nurturing character development and national unity often consider sport as apolitical—as well as removed from the social inequalities that are embedded in American society (Allison et al., 2021; Butterworth, 2020; Knoester et al., 2021; Thorson and Serazio, 2018).

Although the relationships between sport, cultural values, and even 'politics' are well documented, not all Americans recognize these relationships, or, rather, some may not be

willing to accept their existence (Montez de Oca and Suh, 2019; Serazio and Thorson, 2020; Spaaij et al., 2015; Zirin, 2007). Americans who desire to keep sport apolitical often ignore, or even celebrate, the political messaging inherently present in symbolic displays of American pride, such as the playing of the national anthem or the shows of military strength and appreciation (Bryant, 2018; Serazio and Thorson, 2020; White et al., 2008). In fact, the unquestioned acceptance of these exhibitions as inherently and proudly American by many people (re)creates understandings of what it means to be a 'real' American (Bryant, 2018; Chaplin and Montez de Oca, 2019; Knoester et al., 2021; Zang, 2001). Nonetheless, overall, the extent to which US adults recognize sport's connections to patriotism, capitalism, nationalism, and militarism is unclear.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which US adults report that US sport generally teaches (a) love of country (i.e. patriotism), (b) competition as a way of life (i.e. the values of capitalism), (c) how to be an American (i.e. nationalism), and (d) respect for the military (i.e. militarism). Further, we theorize about, and investigate, how dominant statuses (i.e. gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status (SES)), traditionalism (i.e. social group affiliations involving religion, politics, generation, and rurality that encourage the sanctification of tradition), and sports fandom may be linked to recognitions of patriotism, capitalism, nationalism, and militarism in US sport.

We advance prior research by (a) theorizing about the socialization processes of patriotic, capitalistic, nationalistic, and militaristic values through sport, (b) offering empirical evidence of the extent to which adults recognize these processes, through the use of unique sports and society survey data from a new, large national sample of US adults, (c) assessing the extent to which dominant statuses, indicators of traditionalism, and sports fandom are connected to beliefs about the values in sport, and (d) understanding these sport socialization processes as largely promoting, celebrating, and sacralizing American Institutionalized Sports Nationalism (AISN).

Although a great deal of historical and qualitative research has considered these questions and contributed ample evidence of patriotic, capitalistic, nationalistic, and militaristic messaging in sport, there is no evidence of the extent to which US adults, as a whole, recognize such sport messaging (Andrews, 2019; Gruneau, 1999; Serazio and Thorson, 2020; Thorson and Serazio, 2018). In this study, we offer novel quantitative evidence of the extent to which US adults seem to be 'falsely conscious' of the cultural value and assimilation messaging in sport through AISN. Furthermore, we assess the extent to which factors linked to dominance, traditionalism, and sports fandom lead to different levels of awareness of AISN. In so doing, this work complements and extends the most comparable recent research on US adults' beliefs about sports and politics (i.e. Allison et al., 2021; Knoester et al., 2021; Serazio and Thorson, 2020; Thorson and Serazio, 2018).

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework for this study emphasizes the social construction of AISN and individuals' exposure to it through socialization processes and habituations in sport and society. We begin with understandings of sport being affected by social structure and the

broader culture, including its promoted and embedded values, and yet being constitutive of them, too. Consequently, there are opportunities during sport activities to reinforce or change cultural values and social structures (Allison and Knoester, 2021; Carrington, 2010; Gruneau, 1999; Montez de Oca, 2013; Zirin, 2007). Through these processes, AISN is continually (re)produced.

Social learning theory (SLT) (Bandura, 1971) offers explanations for how people come to largely accept and embrace cultural values and the behaviors that reinforce them. In addition, we draw upon theorizing about rhetorical entanglement and ritual to highlight how AISN and its component values become further taught, amplified, and sacralized in and through sport (Birrell, 1981; Montez de Oca, 2013; Sirvent and Reyburn, 2017). Finally, the notion by Ong (1996) of cultural citizenship is relevant to how cultural processes in sport are linked to producing an awareness of who is a 'real' American and how that is intertwined with AISN (Knoester and Rockhill, 2021; Knoester et al., 2021; Montez de Oca, 2013).

First, SLT highlights that we learn through not only direct experiences but also through observing and processing modeled behaviors. Reinforcement occurs as we recognize the expected thoughts, values, and behaviors that are celebrated, rewarded, and thought to be appropriate. Thus, there is interplay between social experiences and cognitive processes such that cultural values are commonly embraced and self-regulation of adapting these values, and engaging in behaviors that reinforce them, occurs. Consequently, we learn cultural values and are encouraged to follow expected protocols in promoting them, in sport and society (Bandura, 1971; Knoester and Ridpath, 2020; Knoester et al., 2021; Montez de Oca, 2013).

Rhetorical entanglements and sport rituals further promote and sanctify AISN and its components (Birrell, 1981; McDonald, 2020; Schimmel, 2017; Sirvent and Reyburn, 2017). AISN is interwoven into the contexts of sport through the everyday interactions and practices of sporting events (e.g. displaying the flag, recognizing military symbols and contributions, celebrating competition), encouraging its communal acceptance among sport fans and participants (McDonald, 2020; Schimmel, 2017; Sirvent and Reyburn, 2017). The persuasiveness of the rhetorical entanglements is heightened through the affective rituals of sporting events, wherein the 'collective effervescence' that arises from communal and impassionate ritualistic and enthusiastic celebrations of cultural values occurs (Birrell, 1981; Knoester et al., 2021; McDonald, 2020). Yet, rituals are a balance of consent, resistance, and appropriation of values (Birrell, 1981; Mosher, 2006). Thus, there are uneven responses to the affective rituals, celebrations, and expectations in sport of patriotism, capitalism, nationalism, and militarism (Allison et al., 2021; Montez de Oca, 2013; Montez de Oca and Suh, 2019; Smith, 2020; Zirin, 2007).

Finally, AISN is integrated with cultural citizenship such that the expectations for embracing AISN, by celebrating its values and sacralizing its rituals, are viewed as a hallmark for being a 'real' American by many people (Butterworth, 2020; Knoester et al., 2021; Montez de Oca, 2013; Smith, 2020). Most apparently, these processes and their consequences have been illustrated through reactions to purported disrespect to the country, the national anthem, the flag, capitalism, and the military (Montez de Oca and Suh, 2019; Mosher, 2006; Newman and Giardina, 2011; Zirin, 2007). The links between AISN and cultural citizenship are meaningful, in part, because individuals

with more dominant statuses in society, more wedded to traditionalism, and more invested in sports fandom may especially seek to uphold respect for AISN and stigmatize those who do not think and act in ways that are perceived as appropriate (Montez de Oca, 2013; Montez de Oca and Suh, 2019; Serazio and Thorson, 2020; Smith, 2020; Zirin, 2007).

AISN and its component values

For over a century, sport has functioned to instill and reify senses of community and notions of American patriotism, nationalism, militarism, capitalism, and exceptionalism (Butterworth, 2020; Montez de Oca, 2013; Newman and Giardina, 2011; Zirin, 2007). The (re)production of these socialization process, along with rhetorical entanglements, has led to the promotion of AISN and its component cultural values (Allison et al., 2021; Birrell, 1981; Knoester et al., 2021; Montez de Oca, 2013; Mosher, 2006; Sirvent and Reyburn, 2017; Smith, 2020).

First, we consider nationalism and patriotism. Sport involvement has been recognized as generating an Americanizing effect, that is, through participating and watching sport, one can learn and take on the essential values, expectations, and behaviors that are expected in the United States and become Americanized—and recognized as such (Montez de Oca, 2013; Smith, 2020; Zang, 2001). Of course, nationalism is taught throughout society, but it is reinforced and amplified in sport—as sport is thought to reflect the character and values of the country, in addition to (re)producing them. American sporting events celebrate love of country, rugged individualism, competition, militaristic might, and athletic excellence —which, to many, symbolize America's cultural superiority (Butterworth, 2020; Knoester et al., 2021; Montez de Oca, 2013; Smith, 2020; White et al., 2008). Further, sport is commonly associated with feelings and expressions of unity and opportunity in America. Americans tend to recognize sport as a place where differences along racial/ethnic, political, gender, and class lines can be seemingly erased, and we can all unite as equal members of a beloved nation (Allison et al., 2021; Butterworth, 2020; Serazio and Thorson, 2020). Consequently, sport may be considered representative of the best of America, its egalitarian ideals, and a celebration and recognition of American exceptionalism (Butterworth, 2020; Montez de Oca, 2013; Newman and Giardina, 2011; Smith, 2020; Zang, 2001). However, as many critics have noted, this messaging glosses over apparent problems (e.g. inequalities, warmongering) and a selective imagining of who counts as a 'real' American (Andrews, 2019; Knoester and Rockhill, 2021; Montez de Oca, 2013; Serazio and Thorson, 2020).

Nevertheless, through rhetorical entanglements and sport rituals, symbols of patriotism and nationalism have become sacralized through US sport (Birrell, 1981; Butterworth, 2020; Knoester et al., 2021; McDonald, 2020; Mosher, 2006). It is common to have the national anthem played, hear renditions of 'God Bless America', see displays of giant American flags, and view reverence being paid to military personnel at sport events (Bryant, 2018; Schimmel, 2017; White et al., 2008). Between these pervasive displays of patriotism, a mythologized and mostly egalitarian perspective of sport opportunities, and a collective celebration of assumed American exceptionalism, it is unsurprising that most Americans identify sport as a source of national identity and pride (Allison et al., 2021; Brenan, 2019; Montez de Oca and Suh, 2019; Mosher, 2006).

Relatedly, socialization messaging and rhetorical entanglements through sport rituals have promoted awe, respect, and appreciation for the military (Butterworth, 2020; Sirvent and Reyburn, 2017). For many, the US military symbolizes American pride, sacrifice, and exceptionalism (Brenan, 2019; Montez de Oca and Suh, 2019). Military appreciation has become engrained in American culture, in part, through the 'military-industrialized-media-entertainment network' (MIME-NET) (Der Derian, 2009: xxxi). The MIME-NET has normalized war by creating a sanitized image of war for the American public, making it appear as bloodless and humanitarian.

Largely, the MIME-NET has utilized sport presentations for its messaging (Der Derian, 2009; Fischer, 2014; Montez de Oca, 2013; Stempel, 2006). For example, the military has extensively connected itself to sport through marketing and advertising to increase recruitment, garner support and investment in military efforts, and silence criticisms of the use of military in American foreign policy (Jenkins, 2013; Stempel, 2006; Zirin, 2007). Thus, the military has intertwined itself within sport, often through 'paid patriotism,' making it difficult for Americans to separate enthusiasm for sport from unquestioned support and appreciation for the military (Jenkins, 2013; Knoester et al., 2021; Schimmel, 2017; White et al., 2008).

Finally, socialization messages, rhetorical entanglements, and sport rituals emphasize values associated with capitalism and neoliberalism. The promotion and sacralization of capitalist principles (e.g. competition, commercialization, deserved winners), particularly competition, within US sport is pervasive (Coakley, 2011; Hartmann, 2016; Newman and Giardina, 2011). Sport continually promotes competition as dramatic, fair, and a just and appropriate means to allocate rewards (Coakley, 2011; King-White, 2018; Newman and Giardina, 2011). In fact, competition is inherent to common definitions of sport, and previous survey research has found that most Americans believe competition is the primary value reinforced through sport (USADA, 2011).

Indeed, capitalist and neoliberal principles have become widely accepted and promoted in sport (Coakley, 2011; Overman, 2011; USADA, 2011). Perhaps, this is best illustrated by America's embrace of privatized and commercialized sport, which promotes free-market principles, competition, individualism, and achievement (Coakley, 2011; Overman, 2011). At the professional and collegiate levels, capitalist and neoliberal principles are sacralized through merchandising, corporate sponsorship, advertisements, and athletes marketing themselves as brands (Coakley, 2011; King-White, 2018; Newman and Giardina, 2011; Overman, 2011). At the youth level, privatization has led to a lack of access and opportunity for those without the necessary resources to compete (Erdal, 2018; Tompsett and Knoester, 2021). Lastly, communities and sponsors have intentionally implemented sport-for-development programs to nurture, control, and rehabilitate participants by encouraging values thought to be key to success in capitalistic markets: hard work, discipline, perseverance, and delayed gratification (Coakley, 2011; Darnell, 2010; Hartmann, 2016; Overman, 2011). Ultimately, messaging embedded within sport promotes winners of competitions, in sport and in life, as deserving and worthy of praise and respect (Coakley, 2011; Hartmann, 2016).

Patriotic, nationalistic, militaristic, and capitalistic messaging, symbolism, and rituals in sport are present. Yet, just because this rhetoric is present does not mean that everyone

will recognize, embrace, or even sacralize it (Andrews, 2019; Gruneau, 1999). Indeed, the power of rituals comes from people having agency to consent, resist, or appropriate the values presented in them (Birrell, 1981; Gruneau, 1999; McDonald, 2020; Newman and Giardina, 2011; Zirin, 2007). The disparate responses of Americans on whether they supported Colin Kaepernick in his recent protests for racial justice during the playing of the national anthem, and in how Americans have responded to subsequent challenges to AISN messaging, have highlighted differences in their social psychological processing. Americans clearly disagree about the perceived presence of patriotic and nationalist rhetoric presented in sport, its appropriateness, and who is considered a 'real American' (Allison et al., 2021; Knoester et al., 2021; Montez de Oca and Suh, 2019; Serazio and Thorson, 2020). Similarly, there are apparent disagreements about the militaristic and capitalistic messaging and values that are embedded in sports (Montez de Oca and Suh, 2019; Mosher, 2006; Newman and Giardina, 2011; Zirin, 2007). Yet, it is unclear to what extent US adults are cognizant of the messaging, how prominent social factors may influence their social psychological processing, and the extent to which adults support, neglect, or criticize AISN messaging.

Dominant statuses, traditionalism, and sports fandom

Dominant statuses (i.e. White, heterosexual, male, higher SES), indicators of traditionalism (i.e. Republican, Christian, older and rural adults), and sports fandom are social factors that are likely to affect one's likelihood of recognizing and embracing AISN and its component values, as they are presented in sport. First, the rhetoric of AISN in sport is likely to resonate with individuals who possess dominant statuses as the meanings, symbols, and rituals entangled in sport generally support the continued dominance of such statuses by maintaining the status quo in society (Allison et al., 2021; Knoester et al., 2021; Knoester and Allison, 2021; Knoester and Ridpath, 2020).

Members of dominant groups in society, especially White heterosexual men, are more likely to identify as patriarchal patriots and to disapprove of athletes' protests that they perceive as challenging to AISN (Allison et al., 2021; Chaplin and Montez de Oca, 2019; Knoester et al., 2021; Kusz, 2018; Thorson and Serazio, 2018). Further, dominant group statuses have been tied to embracing capitalist and neoliberal principles (Newman and Giardina, 2011; Thorson and Serazio, 2018). In addition, the individualism and meritocracy that are entangled in American sport often represent an ethos that seeks to promote hard-working White athletes as models of the Protestant Ethic (Leonard, 2017; Overman, 2011), traditional understandings of masculinity (Allison and Knoester, 2021; Knoester and Allison, 2021; Montez de Oca, 2013; Newman and Giardina, 2011; Stempel, 2006), and the justification and naturalization of greater control and access to sport for those with higher levels of SES (Coakley, 2011; Gruneau, 1999; Hartmann, 2016; King-White, 2018; Tompsett and Knoester, 2021). Last, military flyovers, military appreciation events, and fatigue-based uniforms reaffirm values such as hegemonic masculinity, a strong military, and symbolic forms of patriotism that is embraced by dominant groups (Fischer, 2014; Kusz, 2018; Montez de Oca, 2013; Stempel, 2006).

Second, sport is heavily intertwined with traditions, both on and off the field, and has mythologized them along with AISN and its component values. Thus, sport and those who follow it are often nostalgic, often enjoy celebrating traditions within and outside of sport, and are often resistant to changes to sport and society (Allison et al., 2021; Knoester and Ridpath, 2020; Knoester et al., 2021; Spaaij et al., 2015; Zirin, 2007). Consequently, social group affiliations and identities that encourage sport involvement, a heightened nostalgia, and a resistance to change (e.g. Republican, Christian, older and rural adults) may be supportive of AISN. Republicans, Christians, and older Americans are more likely to identify as patriarchal patriots, embrace capitalist principles, and demonstrate hawkish support for the military (Brenan, 2019; Thorson and Serazio, 2018). Further, those with traditionalist group affiliations have been more likely to criticize athletes' protests, generally because they recognize the protests as commonly anti-racist, potentially disruptive to the status quo, and threatening to their comfort with AISN presentations (Allison et al., 2021; Chaplin and Montez de Oca, 2019; Knoester et al., 2021; Serazio and Thorson, 2020). Republicans and Christians have also sacralized neoliberalism, capitalism, and beliefs of meritocracy in sport and American society (Hawzen and Newman, 2017; Kusz, 2018; Newman and Giardina, 2011).

Finally, sports fandom may be positively associated with an embrace of AISN, due to the presentation of patriotic symbols, the celebration of competition, and the reverence given to the military during sporting events (Knoester et al., 2021; Mosher, 2006). Consistent exposure to this rhetoric is likely to lead to a communal understanding and appreciation for these values. For example, sport fans have been found to internalize meritocratic messaging, suggesting they are less likely to blame structural factors for failures and support for the military (Thorson and Serazio, 2018).

Hypotheses

Overall, our conceptual framework and previous research lead to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: US adults will commonly recognize that sports endorse the cultural values of patriotism, capitalism, militarism, and nationalism. That is, they will agree that sports teach love of country, competition as a way of life, respect for the military, and teach one how to be American.

Hypothesis 2: Adults that occupy more dominant statuses in society (i.e. White, men, heterosexual, high SES) will be more likely to recognize (and tacitly endorse) these connections.

Hypothesis 3: Indicators of traditionalism (i.e. Christian, Republican, older generation, rural resident) will be positively associated with agreeing that sports teach patriotic, capitalistic, militaristic, and nationalistic values.

Hypothesis 4: Sports fandom will be positively associated with recognizing these connections and, by definition of being a sports fan, generally endorsing them.

Method

Data come from the National Sports and Society Survey (NSASS), a unique new large-scale survey ($N = 3993$) that was designed to enable quantitative research into sports and society issues. A central focus of the NSASS was to inquire about public opinions about cultural values, particularly values that seem to be celebrated and contested in sports. During the Fall of 2018 through the Spring of 2019, invitations to take the NSASS were given to members of the American Population Panel (APP) who had reported their birth years to be 21–65 years ago until a quota of 4000 respondents completed the survey. The APP is a panel of over 20,000 adults who have volunteered to participate in social science research studies for the Center for Human Resource Research. The NSASS was administered online, and respondents were compensated with $35 for their participation. Respondents were disproportionately White, female, and Midwestern; thus, the data are frequently being weighted to offer more representative estimates of the descriptive results from NSASS analyses (Knoester and Cooksey, 2020).

The analytic sample for the present study consists of the full NSASS sample ($N = 3993$) because of the wealth of information that is available for each respondent —even when several do not answer the questions used to construct some number of our dependent variables. We use multiple imputations with chained equations to address missing data that exists from respondents not providing substantive answers (i.e. responding Don't Know (DK) or Refused) to questions, although our findings are robust to the use of listwise deletions of missing data. There is a modest amount of missing data in the NSASS and the extent of missing data for each variable is reported in Table 1, along with other descriptive characteristics for all variables used in the analyses.

Variables

Five dependent variables indicate public opinions about whether sports teach cultural values that are supportive of patriotism, capitalism, militarism, nationalism, and AISN. The variables reflect respondents' levels of agreement (1 = *strongly disagree*, 4 = *strongly agree*) with statements that pronounce: 'In general, sports teach…' and ask about (a) love of country, (b) respect for the military, (c) competition as a way of life, and (d) whether American sports teach people how to be Americans. Because these are eminently American cultural values promoted through sports (Andrews, 2019; Montez de Oca, 2013; Newman and Giardina, 2011), we also use a scale of AISN (*alpha* = 0.81) that is created by standardizing each of the (substantive) responses about sports teaching cultural values and taking the mean of these values.

The primary independent variables tap dominant statuses and identities, indicators of traditionalism and sports fandom. Gender (1 = *male*) and sexuality (1 = *heterosexual*) are coded as dichotomous self-identities. Racial/ethnic identities consist of mutually exclusive dummy variables for (only) White (reference category), (any) Black, Latinx (non-Black), and other race/ethnicity. Age is a continuous variable, while education (having a college—used as reference category, some college, or a high school or less education), rurality (living in a large city—used as reference category, a suburb near a large city, a

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for all variables used in the analyses.

	M/%	(SD)	% Missing
Dependent variables			
Sports teach people to love their country	2.47	(0.95)	10
Sports teach competition as a way of life	3.18	(0.76)	1
Sports teach respect for the military	2.22	(0.98)	13
American sports teach how to be American	2.13	(1.01)	7
American Institutionalized Sport Nationalism scale	−0.01	(0.78)	<.5
Predictor variables			
Male	26%		0
Heterosexual	72%		2
Black	10%		1
Latinx	9%		1
Other race/ethnicity	8%		1
(White)	73%		1
Foreign born	4%		1
Age	41.07	(12.64)	0
High School or less	13%		0
Some college	40%		0
(College)	47%		0
Works in paid labor	66%		2
Household income	5.25	(4.01)	15
Married	38%		1
Cohabiting	16%		1
(Single)	46%		1
Number of children	0.57	(1.02)	5
Northeast	14%		0
Midwest	36%		0
South	33%		0
(West)	17%		0
Rural	14%		1
Small city or town	29%		1
Suburban	32%		1
(Urban)	25%		1
Military service	7%		2
Christian	48%		6
Other religion	15%		6
(No religious affiliation)	37%		6
Republican	16%		10
Democrat	47%		10
Other party	14%		10
(Independent)	23%		10
Watch/follow sports	87%		1
Sports fandom	2.20	(1.28)	<.5

Note: $N = 3993$; reference categories in parentheses.

small city or town, or a rural area), religious affiliation (no religious affiliation—used as reference category, a Christian affiliation, or another religious affiliation), and political party identification (identifying with the republican, democratic, other, or no—used as reference category—party) use dummy variables. Finally, sports fandom (0 = *not at all*; 4 = *very much so*) is drawn from responses to the question: 'Are you a sports fan?' Relatedly, we use a dichotomous measure of whether respondents reported that they have watched or followed sports over the past year (1 = *yes*).

Control variables for the study include measures of family and work contexts, geographical region, military veteran status, and being foreign born. Employment status (1 = *works in paid labor*) is a dummy variable, while household income is coded in $10,000's (top coded at 15). Marital status consists of dummy variables for being (a) married, (b) cohabiting, or (c) single (reference category). Number of children in the household indicates the number of one's own, or a partner's, children who live in the household. Census regions are used to indicate geographic region and indicate living in the (a) West—used as reference category, (b) Midwest, (c) South, or (d) Northeast. Military veteran status (1 = *yes*) indicates reports of serving in the military, while foreign born indicates reports of being born outside of the United States (1 = *yes*).

Results

The analysis for this study consists of two stages. First, we assess descriptive statistics of the extent to which US adults agree with statements about sport's encouragement of patriotism, militarism, capitalism, and nationalism. Then, we use multiple regression analyses to analyze the extent to which dominant statuses, indicators of traditionalism, and sports fandom predict beliefs about sport's connections to patriotism, capitalism, militarism, nationalism, and a blend of these cultural values, which we describe as AISN.

First, as shown in Table 1, NSASS respondents reported, on average, they somewhat agreed or somewhat disagreed that sports teach a love of country. Specifically, 12% strongly agreed, 35% somewhat agreed, 25% somewhat disagreed, and 17% strongly disagreed that sports teach one to love one's country (10% responded DK). NSASS respondents more solidly agreed that sports teach competition as a way of life: 36% strongly agreed, 48% somewhat agreed, 12% somewhat disagreed, and 3% strongly disagreed (1% responded DK). As for recognizing that sports teach respect for the military, NSASS respondents tended toward somewhat disagreeing with this statement: 10% strongly agreed, 25% somewhat agreed, 29% somewhat disagreed, and 25% strongly disagreed that sports teach respect for the military (13% responded DK). Most respondents disagreed with the claim that American sports teach one how to be American, that is, 11% strongly agreed, 22% somewhat agreed, 29% somewhat disagreed, and 31% strongly disagreed (7% responded DK). Finally, although the descriptive statistic reported in Table 1 reflects the standardization of the component indicators of the AISN, the unstandardized mean of 2.51 suggests that NSASS respondents tend slightly toward somewhat agreeing that sports teach AISN.

After weighting the NSASS findings based on 2018 American Community Survey characteristics, as shown in Figure 1, we find estimates that are generally close to the unweighted results—but indicate a typical modest shift of 4% toward more (strong)

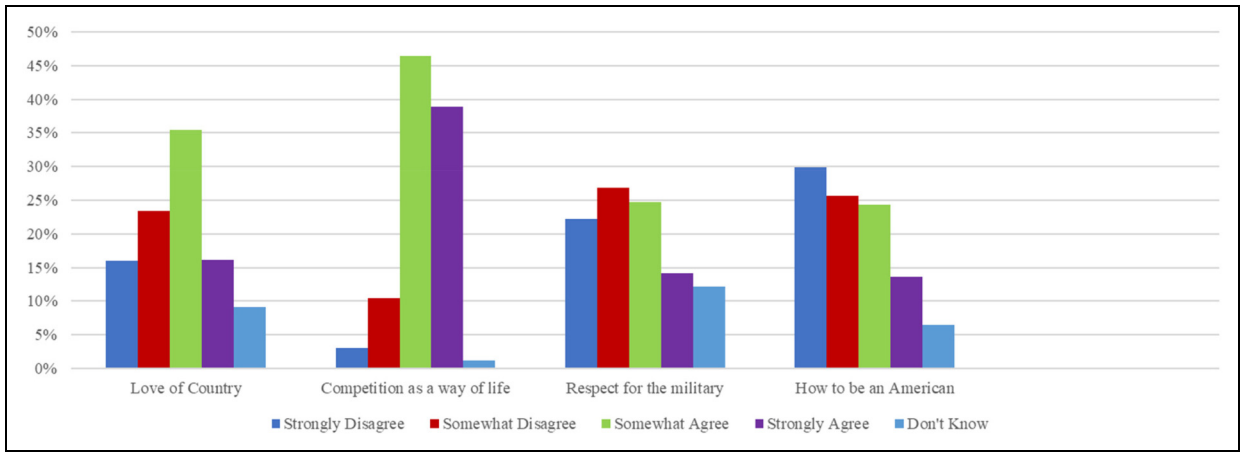

Figure 1. Weighted comparison estimates of US adults agreeing that, in general, sports teach love of country, competition as a way of life, and respect for the military and that American sports teach one how to be an American.

agreement that sports teach love of country, competition as a way of life, respect for the military, and nationalism. Accordingly, the estimated average perception of the existence of AISN (i.e. unstandardized weighted reports that were used for the AISN scale) is slightly higher among all US adults (i.e. 2.65), compared with among the NSASS respondents.

Next, we turn to our ordinal logistic regression results. First, there is evidence of dominant statuses, indicators of traditionalism, and sports fandom being positively associated with agreeing that sports teach love of country, as hypothesized. As shown in Model 1 of Table 2, identifying as heterosexual (odds ratio (OR) = 1.86, $p < 0.001$) is positively associated with believing that sports teach love of country, that is, the OR indicates that the odds for 'strongly agreeing,' as compared to another response, are 86% higher for adults who identify as heterosexual versus those who identify as a sexual minority. There is also some evidence that identifying as male is positively associated with recognizing that sports teach patriotism (OR = 1.13, $p < 0.10$). Yet, in contrast to expectations, identifying as Black (OR = 1.48, $p < 0.001$), Latinx (OR = 2.01, $p < 0.001$), or other (OR = 1.28, $p < 0.05$) race/ethnicity, compared with identifying as White, seems to encourage a belief that sports teach love of country. This may be reflective of recognizing the disproportionately open pathway of sports performance to social mobility for racial/ethnic minorities, particularly African Americans, in the United States. Relatedly, it may reflect a constructive patriotism that views sports as a valuable space to challenge the status quo of racial/ethnic inequalities throughout history (Allison et al., 2021; Bryant, 2018; Montez de Oca and Suh, 2019). Additionally, compared with adults with a college education, those who have a high school degree or less (OR = 1.57, $p < 0.001$) are more likely to perceive that sports teach love of country. This is supported by previous research that notes the celebration of love of country in sports by those without a college education, especially (Allison et al., 2021; Knoester et al., 2021; Newman and Giardina, 2011).

In the results displayed in Model 2 of Table 2, there is evidence that more voluntary affiliations and corresponding identities further shape perceptions of the extent to which sports teach patriotism. As hypothesized, identifying as a Christian (OR = 1.71, $p < 0.001$) and as a Republican (OR = 1.59, $p < 0.001$) are positively associated with believing that sports teach love of country. Also, sports fandom (OR = 1.54, $p < 0.001$) is positively associated with believing that sports teach patriotism; relatedly, there is some evidence that watching or following sports (OR = 1.21, $p < 0.10$) is positively associated with believing that sports teach patriotism.

There is also evidence of dominant statuses, indicators of traditionalism, and sports fandom being positively associated with agreeing that sports teach competition as a way of life. Consistent with expectations, the results from Model 3 show that identifying as male (OR = 1.35, $p < 0.001$) is positively associated with believing that sports teach competition as a way of life. Unexpectedly, identifying as Black (OR = 1.28, $p < 0.05$) or other race/ethnicity (OR = 1.27, $p < 0.05$), compared with identifying as White, is positively associated with perceiving that sports teach competition as a way of life. It may be that White individuals focus upon other functions of sport, in society (Allison et al., 2021; Hartmann, 2016; Hawzen and Newman, 2017).

As seen in Model 4 of Table 2, more voluntary affiliations and their corresponding identities appear to additionally affect beliefs about sports endorsing capitalistic

Table 2. Results from ordinal logistic regressions predicting beliefs about the cultural values that are embedded in sports.

Variable	(1) Patriotism OR	(2) Patriotism OR	(3) Competition OR	(4) Competition OR	(5) Militarism OR	(6) Militarism OR
Male	1.13+	0.93	1.35[c]	1.24[b]	1.24[b]	1.03
Heterosexual	1.86[c]	1.33[c]	1.01	0.89	1.76[c]	1.30[b]
Black	1.48[c]	1.30[a]	1.28[a]	1.24+	1.25[a]	1.08
Latinx	2.01[c]	1.69[c]	1.19	1.10	1.69[c]	1.39[b]
Other race/ethnicity	1.28[a]	1.22+	1.27[a]	1.25+	1.10	1.02
Foreign born	1.51[a]	1.81[c]	0.77	0.83	1.07	1.26
Age	1.00	0.99[c]	1.00	1.00	1.01+	1.00
High school or less	1.57[c]	1.56[c]	0.96	0.94	1.39[b]	1.35[b]
Some college	1.11	1.10	1.05	1.04	1.07	1.05
Works in paid labor	1.06	1.04	1.01	1.00	1.02	1.00
Household income	0.99	0.98	0.99	0.99	0.99	0.99
Married	0.95	0.93	1.09	1.08	0.99	0.97
Cohabiting	0.97	0.98	1.06	1.09	1.05	1.08
Number of children	1.11[b]	1.03	1.05	1.02	1.06+	1.00
Northeast	1.38[b]	1.32[a]	1.41[b]	1.40[b]	1.28[a]	1.24[a]
Midwest	1.10	1.01	1.10	1.08	1.02	0.96
South	1.29[b]	1.12	1.19[a]	1.13	1.27[b]	1.13
Selected statuses/identities						
Rural		0.99		0.98		0.95
Small city or town		0.96		1.02		0.88
Suburban		1.03		1.11		0.89
Military service		0.93		1.13		1.10
Christian		1.71[c]		1.22[a]		1.71[c]
Other religion		1.14		0.99		1.20[a]
Republican		1.59[c]		1.43[b]		1.53[c]
Democrat		0.97		1.13		0.92
Other party		1.00		1.18		1.08
Watch/follow sports		1.21+		0.79[a]		1.04
Sports fandom		1.54[c]		1.18[c]		1.48[c]

OR: odds ratios.
Note: $N = 3993$.
+$p < 0.10$.
[a]$p < 0.05$.
[b]$p < 0.01$.
[c]$p < 0.001$.

values. Indicators of traditionalism such as identifying as Christian (OR = 1.22, $p < 0.05$) and Republican (OR = 1.43, $p < 0.001$) are positively associated with believing that sports teach competition as a way of life, as hypothesized. Also, sports fandom (OR = 1.18, $p < 0.001$) is positively associated with believing that sports endorse capitalistic values, as expected. Unexpectedly, though, simply watching or following sports (OR = 0.79, $p < 0.05$) is negatively associated with recognizing that sports teach competition as a way of life; it may be that the hypercompetitive aspects of sport are not as readily recognized by casual sports observers, on average (Allison and Knoester, 2021; Erdal, 2018).

Models 5 and 6 of Table 2 display the results for beliefs about sports teaching respect for the military. Consistent with our hypotheses, there is evidence that dominant statuses, indicators of traditionalism, and sports fandom are positively associated with agreeing that sports teach respect for the military. Male (OR = 1.24, $p < 0.01$) and heterosexual (OR = 1.76, $p < 0.001$) adults are more likely to agree that sports teach respect for the military, as shown in Model 5. Again, unexpectedly, White adults are less likely to recognize connections between sports and AISN, identifying as Black (OR = 1.25, $p < 0.05$) or Latinx (OR = 1.69, $p < 0.001$) is positively associated with believing that sports teach respect for the military. Also, compared with having a college education, having a high school or less education (OR = 1.39, $p < 0.01$) more likely leads one to believe that sports teach respect for the military. This may reflect the disproportionate representation in the military by racial/ethnic minorities and the less educated.

Furthermore, more voluntary affiliations and corresponding identities are also linked to recognizing relationships between sports and militarism, consistent with expectations, as shown in Model 6 of Table 2. Identifying as Christian (OR = 1.71, $p < 0.001$), Republican (OR = 1.53, $p < 0.001$), and more of a sports fan (OR = 1.48, $p < 0.001$) are positively associated with agreeing that sports teach respect for the military.

In Table 3, we finally turn to predicting adults' beliefs about sports endorsing nationalism and use a scale of AISN as our last dependent variable. There is evidence that dominant statuses, indicators of traditionalism, and sports fandom are connected to adults' beliefs about American sports teaching what it means to be an American, as hypothesized. In Model 1, identifying as male (OR = 1.45, $p < 0.001$) and heterosexual (OR = 1.80, $p < 0.001$) are positively associated with agreeing that sports encourage a national identity. Unexpectedly, compared with identifying as White, identifying as Latinx (OR = 1.87, $p < 0.001$) seems to encourage a belief that sports teach a national identity. Also, compared with having a college education, having a high school or less education seems to encourage a belief that sports teach a national identity. It may be that White and college educated adults are less cognizant and appreciative of the cultural citizenship processes that are enmeshed in sports (Bryant, 2018; Knoester and Rockhill, 2021; Newman and Giardina, 2011).

In Model 2 of Table 3, more voluntary affiliations and corresponding identities are further considered. As hypothesized, identifying as Christian (OR = 1.69, $p < 0.001$) and Republican (OR = 1.66, $p < 0.001$) are positively associated with recognizing that American sports teach one how to be American. In addition, sports fandom (OR = 1.55, $p < 0.001$) is positively associated with believing that sports teach a national identity.

Table 3. Results from ordinal logistic regressions predicting beliefs about the cultural values that are embedded in sports.

Variable	(1) Nationalism OR	(2) Nationalism OR	(3) AISN Scale OR	(4) AISN Scale OR
Male	1.45[c]	1.19[a]	1.37[c]	1.13+
Heterosexual	1.80[c]	1.27[b]	1.69[c]	1.21[b]
Black	1.21+	1.04	1.36[b]	1.19+
Latinx	1.87[c]	1.51[c]	1.85[c]	1.49[c]
Other race/ethnicity	1.10	1.03	1.21+	1.16
Foreign born	0.94	1.11	1.07	1.26
Age	1.00	0.99[a]	1.00	0.99[a]
High school or less	1.27[a]	1.22+	1.31[b]	1.25[a]
Some college	1.04	1.01	1.09	1.06
Works in paid labor	0.95	0.92	1.02	0.99
Household income	0.98[a]	0.98[a]	0.99	0.98+
Married	1.09	1.06	1.03	1.01
Cohabiting	1.08	1.11	1.05	1.00
Number of children	1.06+	0.98	1.08[b]	1.01
Northeast	1.35[b]	1.32[a]	1.43[c]	1.38[b]
Midwest	1.19[a]	1.12	1.11	1.04
South	1.32[b]	1.17+	1.34[c]	1.18[a]
Selected statuses/identities				
Rural		0.86		0.94
Small city or town		0.79[b]		0.91
Suburban		0.86+		0.96
Military service		1.14		1.13
Christian		1.69[c]		1.71[c]
Other religion		1.17+		1.12
Republican		1.66[c]		1.71[c]
Democrat		0.86+		0.98
Other party		1.07		1.10
Watch/follow sports		1.17		1.00
Sports fandom		1.55[c]		1.51[c]

AISN: American Institutionalized Sport Nationalism Scale; OR: odds ratios.
Note: $N = 3993$.
+$p < 0.10$.
[a]$p < 0.05$.
[b]$p < 0.01$.
[c]$p < 0.001$.

Finally, there is evidence that dominant statuses, indicators of traditionalism, and sports fandom are connected to adults' recognition of AISN. These results are presented in Models 3 and 4 of Table 3. Male (OR = 1.37, $p < 0.001$) and heterosexual (OR = 1.69, $p < 0.001$) adults are particularly likely to believe that sports promote AISN, as expected. In contrast to our original hypothesis, but in line with our previously reported results,

there is also evidence that compared with identifying as White, identifying as Black (OR = 1.36, $p < 0.01$) or Latinx (OR = 1.85, $p < 0.001$) encourages a recognition of AISN. Also, compared with having a college education, having a high school or less education (OR = 1.31, $p < 0.01$) is associated with stronger agreement that sports teach AISN.

In Model 4 of Table 3, more voluntary statuses and identities are taken into account. Consistent with expectations, identifying as Christian (OR = 1.71, $p < 0.001$), Republican (OR = 1.71, $p < 0.001$), and more of a sports fan (OR = 1.51, $p < 0.001$) are positively associated with US adults' beliefs that sports promote AISN.

Discussion

The present study sought to describe and analyze US adults' public opinions about whether sports teach patriotic, capitalistic, militaristic, and nationalistic cultural values. We focused on beliefs about sports teaching (a) love of country, (b) competition as a way of life, (c) respect for the military, and (d) how to be American. We highlighted dominant statuses, indicators of traditionalism, and sports fandom as potential explanatory factors for adults' sports-related beliefs. The findings suggest that social learning processes and rhetorical entanglements in sports combine to encourage some awareness but also work to keep invisible, the extent to which sports nurture patriotic, capitalistic, militaristic, and nationalistic cultural values. Also, cultural citizenship statuses and processes appear to shape beliefs about AISN.

First, we hypothesized US adults would commonly recognize that sports encourage patriotism, capitalism, militarism, and nationalism. In fact, NSASS respondents were only more likely to agree, versus disagree, that sports teach people to love their country (i.e. 47% strongly or somewhat agree vs. 42% strongly or somewhat disagree) and that competition should be a way of life (i.e. 84% agree vs. 15% disagree). Considerable numbers of NSASS respondents also agreed that sports teach respect for the military (i.e. 34% agree; 55% disagree) and that American sports teach one how to be American (i.e. 33% agree; 60% disagree). The weighted estimates, which were designed to be more representative of the public opinions of US adults, were similar; they suggested that U.S. adults were likely to strongly agree that sports teach patriotic, capitalistic, militaristic, and nationalistic values at about 4% higher levels, though.

These results provide empirical evidence that many Americans are aware that the social learning processes embedded in sports teach love of country, competition as a way of life, respect for the military, and a national identity. Yet, many Americans appear to not recognize these socialization processes, perhaps because of the rhetorical entanglements through which they operate. Indeed, scholars suggest US adults are more attuned to the individualist messages about sports building character than to the social cultural messages that are a part of AISN and are often not viewed as political or sports-centric per se (Serazio and Thorson, 2020; USADA, 2011). From a critical perspective, the promotion of AISN can build community and sometimes achieve cooperation and even transcendence through celebrating particular cultural values, but it also sacralizes through sports a love for country and support for capitalism, militarism, and nationalism. Through patriotic fervor and a love of sports, this combination encourages

conformity, maintenance of the status quo, and support for a system that enables elites to control and benefit from unregulated markets, military power, and nativistic tendencies (Andrews, 2019; Butterworth, 2020; Newman and Giardina, 2011; Serazio and Thorson, 2020; Zirin, 2007).

Second, we hypothesized dominant statuses (i.e. White, male, heterosexual, and higher SES) would be positively associated with agreeing that sports teach these cultural values. There was consistent evidence that identifying as male and as heterosexual were positively associated with recognizing the AISN and its component values, as expected. We understand this to be a function of disproportionate knowledge, awareness, power, and support of these cultural messages in sports that generally serve to reify heterosexual men's cultural citizenship statuses—since sports and positions of power outside of sports have been largely controlled and dominated by heterosexual men (Allison and Knoester, 2021; Knoester and Allison, 2021; Montez de Oca, 2013; Spaaij et al., 2015). Unexpectedly, identifying as White was negatively associated with agreeing that sports teach AISN and its component values; Black and Latinx adults were more likely to agree that sports teach patriotism, capitalism, militarism, and nationalism. Also, compared with the college educated, those with a high school or less education were more likely to agree that sports teach patriotic, capitalistic, militaristic, and nationalistic values. It may be that racial/ethnic minorities and the less educated are especially aware, and celebratory, of the unifying functions of AISN and its contributions to elevating the appreciation of sports, for many—since their economic and cultural citizenship status attainment opportunities have typically been less than those who are White and college educated, in society (Allison et al., 2021; Bryant, 2018; Leonard, 2017; Newman and Giardina, 2011). Relatedly, the privileges associated with being White and college educated in America may be encouraging members of these social groups to view sports as unremarkable pieces of culture with rather normalized socialization messages. Previous research finds that White and less-educated adults are especially likely to oppose the mixture of sports and politics—suggesting they do not recognize sports as laden with messages that encourage assimilation and support for the status quo through AISN (Allison et al., 2021; Andrews, 2019; Knoester et al., 2021; Serazio and Thorson, 2020; Thorson and Serazio, 2018).

Third, we hypothesized that indicators of traditionalism (i.e. Christian, Republican, older generation, rural resident) would be positively associated with agreeing that sports teach AISN and its component values. Indeed, Christian and Republican identities were uniformly and positively associated with agreeing that sports teach patriotic, capitalistic, militaristic, and nationalistic values. This is consistent with previous research that suggests those who are Christian and Republican appreciate sports not only for the traditionalism and nostalgia but also for the community and American exceptionalism US sports teach; in fact, Christianity and Republicanism over the past century have become increasingly associated with nationalism, less-regulated capitalism, militarism, less critical patriotism, and a less critical love of sports (Bryant, 2018; Hawzen and Newman, 2017; Knoester and Rockhill, 2021; Knoester et al., 2021; Newman and Giardina, 2011).

Finally, we hypothesized sports fandom would be positively associated with agreeing that sports teach love of country, competition as a way of life, respect for the military, and

nationalism. There is uniform evidence that sports fandom is positively associated with agreeing that sports teach AISN and its component values, as expected. Because of the abundant promotion of patriotic, capitalistic, militaristic, and nationalistic values in sports, this suggests sports fans are not only especially aware of these messages but also that they explicitly, or at least tacitly, approve of these messages because of their continued passion for sports and rare actions of opposition against the manufacturing of AISN and its component values (Andrews, 2019; Bryant, 2018; Newman and Giardina, 2011; Zirin, 2007).

Previous research has noted the heavy entanglement of sports and patriotism, capitalism, militarism, and nationalism (Andrews, 2019; Coakley, 2011; Montez de Oca, 2013). Overall, the findings from this study are important because they offer empirical evidence of the extent to which US adults are aware of these entanglements and recognize sports as teaching love of country, competition as a way of life, respect for the military, and how to be American. Furthermore, we estimate the extent to which dominant statuses, indicators of traditionalism, and sports fandom are linked to public opinions about these cultural values in sport.

Conclusion

Based on the extensive evidence from other studies that Americans are passionate about sports, typically identify as sports fans, and have only occasionally protested the promotion of patriotism, capitalism, militarism, and nationalism in sports, it appears US adults are rarely upset about the extent to which sports teache these cultural values; in fact, many sports fans appear to relish the promotion of these values and most other fans at least tacitly endorse them, in sports (Allison and Knoester, 2021; Knoester and Allison, 2021; Montez de Oca and Suh, 2019; Newman and Giardina, 2011; Thorson and Serazio, 2018). In this study, we found that most US adults do not even acknowledge that sports generally teach most of the cultural values that comprise AISN. Beyond this, many people who do recognize these socialization processes seem to view the promotion of AISN as part of a positive sports experience—and not political at all, oftentimes (Serazio and Thorson, 2020; Thorson and Serazio, 2018). Thus, AISN may explain why some people particularly love and value sports—especially those with dominant statuses, traditionalist tendencies, and sport passions (Andrews, 2019; Montez de Oca and Suh, 2019; Newman and Giardina, 2011; Serazio and Thorson, 2020).

Still, there are some limitations to this research. The NSASS sample is comprised of respondents who explicitly volunteered to take social science research surveys and is also not demographically representative of the US adult population. Thus, additional research that uses more representative samples is needed to complement the present study. In addition, with our use of closed-ended survey questions, we are unable to examine in-depth and subjective articulations from the respondents about the links between sports and the AISN and its component values—as well as the roles that dominant statuses, traditionalist beliefs, and sports fandom may have played in shaping their understandings of these links. Also, notably, our study is only able to recognize patterns in adults' beliefs about the existence of AISN, and its component values, in US sport. This limits

understanding of how the presence, processes, and implications of different versions of institutionalized sports nationalism operate in other countries. Thus, scholars should look to expand research on the presence of and individuals' beliefs about institutionalized sports nationalism in other countries to provide more holistic understandings of how the dynamics may play out in ways that could be quite similar or different to those in the United States. Indeed, this is an important task for future research.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that we found many US adults agree that sports teach love of country, competition as a way of life, respect for the military, and how to be American. They were especially likely to agree that sports teach competition as a way of life and, to a lesser extent, love of country. Many also recognized sports as teaching respect for the military and how to be American, but most did not. Still, the outrage over-protests during the national anthem in recent years, and frequent justifications for this outrage that cite perceived disrespect for the military and for what it means to be American, suggests that many US adults respond to and value the respect for the military and the national identities that sports teach—whether or not they are aware of the processes at work until the values encounter contestations (Bryant, 2018; Montez de Oca and Suh, 2019; Serazio and Thorson, 2020). Although many US adults do not seem to recognize the pervasiveness of AISN and many others may view AISN and its component values as unifying and prosocial values, these cultural values about patriotism, capitalism, militarism, and nationalism are sacralized through sports to be normative and can function to encourage less critical acceptances of love of country, all-encompassing competition and neoliberalism, militarism, and restrictive national identities (Allison et al., 2021; Andrews, 2019; Coakley, 2011; Knoester et al., 2021; Montez de Oca, 2013). Thus, it is important to recognize how links between sports and these cultural values are perceived and, potentially, celebrated.

Beyond this, we found identifying as male, heterosexual, Christian, and Republican were consistently and positively associated with agreeing that sports teach patriotic, capitalistic, militaristic, and nationalistic values, as expected. We interpret these associations as evidence of disproportionately recognizing the messaging within sports and being attracted to sports, in part, because of their entanglements within sports—entanglements that are often seen as apolitical. Yet, sports are especially dominated, controlled, and celebrated by males, heterosexuals, Christians, and Republicans—and these statuses and identities have also tended to disproportionately celebrate the component values of AISN (Hartmann, 2016; Hawzen and Newman, 2017; Knoester et al., 2021; Newman and Giardina, 2011). Relatedly, we find positive associations between sports fandom and agreeing that sports teach AISN and its component values—indeed, being especially familiar and passionate about sports suggests an awareness of sports' messages and being either explicitly or at least tacitly in support of them. Unexpectedly, we find evidence that White adults are less likely than Black and Latinx adults to recognize AISN and its component values; college-educated adults are also less likely than those with a high school education or less to agree that sports teach patriotism, capitalism, militarism, and nationalism. This may be because sports have traditionally been perceived to offer more inclusive and fairer social and economic opportunities, particularly for non-Whites and the less educated (Allison et al., 2021; Bryant, 2018; Hartmann, 2016; Knoester and Ridpath, 2020).

Sports afford valuable opportunities to negotiate and promote cultural values. Teaching love of country, competition as a way of life, respect for the military, and how to be American promotes unifying and assimilative messages of pride, hypercompetitiveness, militarism, and a national identity that can not only bring people together but can also encourage uncritical notions of American exceptionalism, the valuing of competition over cooperation, military investments, and exclusionary national identities. Thus, it is essential to continue to research which cultural messages are promoted through sports, why, and to what effect. The present study offers some headway in this regard, by focusing on public opinions about the messages that sports teach about the cultural values that are associated with patriotism, capitalism, militarism, and nationalism. Based on our findings, it seems that most Americans do not recognize sport as a social institution that promotes AISN—although there is good evidence that it does. Also, among those who do recognize these socialization processes, many seem to be okay with it based on the associations that we found among persons who are sports fans, occupiers of dominant statuses, and traditionalists—combined with previous research findings about their feelings about sports and politics. Thus, on balance, sports seem to be serving the needs and interests of elites and those with relative privilege who most benefit from the status quo in sports and society (Andrews, 2019; Montez de Oca, 2013; Montez de Oca and Suh, 2019; Serazio and Thorson, 2020; Thorson and Serazio, 2018).

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The NSASS was generouslyfunded and supported by the College of Arts & Sciences, the Sports and Society Initiative, and CHRR at The Ohio State University.

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